

## 6. *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub>: Re-Writing the War (1).

### 6.1 Introduction

*In Stahlgewittern* is an account of his career as a front-line soldier and officer during the First World War. It was his only work to achieve near best-seller status and, as one of his most famous and most notorious books, it has provoked a wide range of responses. For Wulf Dieter Müller (1934), writing during the Nazi period, it was ‘das Grundwerk von zeitloser Gültigkeit’;<sup>1</sup> for Wolfgang Kaempfer (1984), half a century later, it is characterised by little more than ‘persönlich interessierter Sadismus und Masochismus’;<sup>2</sup> and for Günther A. Höfler, as we have seen, it delivers a new paradigm of technically mediated perception. The book has been subject to so much praise, condemnation, psychoanalysis (Theweleit) and *Ideologiekritik* (Prümm, Liebchen) that any more comments on it might seem superfluous. However, as Hans-Harald Müller (1995) has pointed out, critics have, on the whole, attempted to create a unified Jünger: ‘Da das Werk umfangreich, heterogen, unübersichtlich und widersprüchlich ist, muß mit Strategien der Homogenisierung und Aspektisolierung so aufgeräumt werden, daß es sich einer widerspruchsfreien Deutung fügt’.<sup>3</sup> In other words, critics tend to oversimplify Jünger to suit their own (often classically modern) agendas, and much work on *In Stahlgewittern* in particular is flawed by the assumption that it is a static text — an assumption encouraged by Jünger who did not draw attention to the substantial revisions he made. Although Böhme, Knebel, Dempewolf and Kunicki have produced extensive studies of Jünger’s revisions, they all begin with *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> since they did not have access to the

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<sup>1</sup> Wulf Dieter Müller, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Kaempfer, ‘Das schöne Böse: Zum ästhetischen Verfahren Ernst Jüngers in den Schriften der dreißiger Jahre im Hinblick auf Nietzsche, Sade und Lautréamont’, *Recherches Germaniques*, 14 (1984), pp. 103-17.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Harald Müller, “Im Grunde erlebt jeder seinen eigenen Krieg”, in *Ernst Jünger im 20. Jahrhundert*, pp. 13-37, (p. 14).

*Kriegstagebuch*.<sup>4</sup> In the first part of this chapter I shall introduce some new material on the genesis of *In Stahlgewittern* before examining the Foreword to its first edition which sets much of the agenda for the book. I shall then devote the greater part of the chapter to a discussion of the nature and extent of Jünger's redactional work when producing *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub>. In so doing I shall pay particular attention to the inconsistencies and instabilities that affect this work and prevent it from realising the book's agenda as that is set out in the Foreword.

## 6.2 The Origins of *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> (1918-20)

Mühleisen (1987) provided an insight into the genesis of *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> by describing how Jünger's father encouraged him during visits home to publish his diaries.<sup>5</sup> During his time in the *Reichswehr*, Jünger's Commanding Officer, Hauptmann Trauthig, also apparently allowed him time to work on his manuscript.<sup>6</sup> I shall expand on Mühleisen's essay by introducing some new material from the *Kriegstagebuch*.

*Ktb* 14a contains an entry elaborating what a Foreword to a published version of the diaries should mention. This text is written in the notebook itself and forms part of the entry of 17 June 1918 — except that Jünger turned the book to one side to write these notes. Nevertheless, we can be relatively certain that these were made on 17 June and not inserted later: first, because Jünger never left gaps between entries, and second, because the handwriting and ink are consistent with the entries around it. The passage reads:

Im Vorwort darauf hinweisen, daß wohl kaum im Kriege von einem Frontsoldaten derartig genaue Aufzeichnungen über jeden Tag gemacht sind, daß diese Blätter also ein Spiegel der großen und kleinen Erlebnisse des Infanteristen der vordersten Linie sind.

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<sup>4</sup> Volmert's critical analysis, overly dependent as it is on Theweleit and Liebchen, suffers further from the author's ignorance of the *Kriegstagebuch*. Placing excessive faith in Böhme's description of the diary text, Volmert does not hesitate to accuse Jünger of 'einen sehr großzügigen, um nicht zu sagen falschmünzerischen Umgang mit den "authentischen" Materialien der Kriegstagebücher' and claims that much of the content is 'frei aus der Erinnerung geschöpft' (p. 27).

<sup>5</sup> Horst Mühleisen, 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Ernst Jüngers Werk *In Stahlgewittern*', *Aus dem Antiquariat* (1987), pp. 376-78. Knebel's essay also contains detailed statistics concerning Jünger's revisions.

<sup>6</sup> There is no manuscript for *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> in Marbach.

Ferner, daß diese Blätter nichts beschönigen und in rosafarbener Beleuchtung darstellen wollen, sondern nur eine genaue Schilderung des täglichen Lebens des Kriegers im Feldlager, im Schützengraben, in der Ruhe und im Gefecht bezwecken, mit all seinen nervenerregenden Aufregungen, mit all den offenen und versteckten Schwierigkeiten, die oft selbst dem, der dabei war, nicht klar geworden sind. Die einzige Rücksichtnahme, die ja eine Veröffentlichung erst ermöglicht, ist die auf noch lebende Teilnehmer.

In other words, Jünger was convinced of the objectivity and value of his diary as a document that reliably recorded the War and was proud of what he considered a unique achievement. The most likely explanation for this almost blind faith in his writing is that the continuing War and the constant process of writing precluded the admission of failings and inconsistencies in the text, since, if Jünger had admitted flaws and fissures, this would have undermined the very foundations of his wartime writing project.

Nevertheless, Jünger soon became aware of how much redactional work would be needed — as is shown by two small sheets of notepaper tucked inside the front cover pocket of *Ktb* 13:<sup>7</sup>

[1<sup>st</sup> sheet] Edition des Tagebuches I

Die Sprache ist noch vielfach zu trocken, muss durch Dialoge aufgefrischt werden.

Die Schilderung wichtiger Abschnitte etc. immer ausgeruht herangehen, die 2-3 ersten Morgenstunden ausnutzen.

Das Tagebuch in seiner ersten Form ist nur ein Rahmen, in den Schilderungen der Landschaft, der jeweiligen Stimmung der Truppe, der Verpflegung, der Unterbringung, der taktischen Vorübungen u.s.w. eingeschoben werden müssen.

[2<sup>nd</sup> sheet] Ed. des Tagebuches II

Jeder Abschnitt muss zuvor genau disponiert werden. Erst die allgemeinen Verhältnisse und Vorbedingungen, — dann die Ausführung.

Immer so schreiben, dass jeder Leser klare Verhältnisse sieht, nicht unbekannte, alleinstehende Namen anführen.

Although these notes are not dated, two things indicate that they refer to his work on *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> rather than a later edition. First, the handwriting suggests that they were written shortly after the War — since it is smaller than, but not as small as, Jünger's handwriting from the late 1920s onwards (and a good deal more legible!). Second, the

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<sup>7</sup> Also tucked into the flap is the death notice of Jünger's friend Lt. Gebhard Schulz who was killed in action in 1918.

reference to the extra detail to be added to the ‘Tagebuch in seiner ersten Form’ suggests he was working directly with the *Kriegstagebuch* and not a version of *In Stahlgewittern*.

The notes illustrate two important aspects of Jünger’s initial redactional work. First, they reveal a literary ambition — hence his desire to add dialogue and introductory detail to each section and to avoid cryptic references. He was successful only with the introductory detail since the dialogues are few and wooden, and plenty of cryptic references to places and names (often abbreviated) and odd comments remain. But second, and more interestingly, these notes conspicuously avoid detailing both what was to be cut out and the actual nature of most of the additions — extensive passages of interpretative and normative commentary which rarely constitute ‘Schilderungen der Landschaft [...]’. Thus, we can tentatively conclude that Jünger was prepared to admit his literary ambitions but was unwilling to admit in writing those uncomfortable aspects of his diary which he would cut and so passed over them in silence. It is this repressed material that would return to deconstruct his book’s lofty ambitions.

### **6.3 The Foreword and the Problems of Monumental History**

In Chapter 4, I analysed Jünger’s precarious social and psychological situation in the immediate post-War period when he needed to make sense of the War if a sense of absurdity were not to overwhelm him. His task was made more difficult by the survivor’s guilt and accompanying sense of debt to fallen comrades. Thus, caught between the weight of the dead and the incomprehension of the living, the Foreword to *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>* is in part an attempt to resolve this dilemma by transcribing his experience into a narrative account which would pay homage to the fallen, present Jünger to the living and give the experience some sense.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the book is clearly intended to function as a textual war memorial, dedicated to the memory of the dead:

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<sup>8</sup> In *Ktb* 14b of the *Kriegstagebuch*, after the section describing his last battle, we find, in a scarcely legible script, drafts for the Foreword of the published edition. Many of the most dramatic sentences of the published Foreword are to be found here.

Möge dies Buch dazu beitragen, eine Ahnung zu geben von dem, was ihr geleistet. Wir haben viel, vielleicht alles, auch die Ehre verloren. Eins bleibt uns: die ehrenvolle Erinnerung an euch, an die herrlichste Armee, die je die Waffen trug und an den gewaltigsten Kampf, der je gefochten wurde (p. IX).

Furthermore, through this remembrance Jünger is also pursuing a half-articulated political agenda:

[Die Erinnerung] hochzuhalten inmitten dieser Zeit weichlichen Gewinsels, der moralischen Verkümmern und des Renegatentums ist stolzeste Pflicht eines jeden, der nicht nur mit Gewehr und Handgranate, sondern auch mit lebendigem Herzen für Deutschlands Größe kämpfte (p. IX).

In other words, Jünger's declared intentions in writing *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> broadly conform to the socio-political functions of the war memorials erected post-1918 as described by Arnold Vogt (1993):

Die Denkmäler [markieren] einen Kernbereich historischer Identität, denn es geht um Leben und Tod, um Grundlagen individueller und national-kollektiver Existenz [...] Dieses Leiden wurde [...] unter ausdrücklicher Berufung auf (vermeintlich?) national-kollektive Interessen und Beweggründe propagiert und gerechtfertigt [...] schließt sogleich politische und ideologische Zukunftserwartungen ein [...] [Denkmäler] leisten einen wichtigen, normativen Beitrag [und] spiegeln das öffentliche vorherrschende Geschichtsbewußtsein.<sup>9</sup>

Nietzsche, in *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (1874),<sup>10</sup> described precisely this sort of historical writing (in the broadest sense), concerned to depict the greatness of the past, and intended to move the present to action, as monumental history ('monumentale Historie'). Jünger's text, then, could be described as an (imperfect) example of this form of narrative, prone to the instabilities which, I shall now show, are inherent in this very form of writing.

Nietzsche's polemic against what he considered the nefarious flaws in contemporary historiography also included a devastating critique of monumental history.

<sup>9</sup> Arnold Vogt, *Den Lebenden zur Mahnung: Denkmäler und Gedenkstätten. Zur Traditionspflege und historischen Identität vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Hanover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1993), pp. 11-12. Vogt also identifies the monumental character of 'Gedenkliteratur' (p. 123) and points to Jünger's 'herausragende Bedeutung' in this area (p. 124); cf. also Jürgen Tietz, 'Monumente des Gedenkens' in *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, pp. 297-408, and George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben', in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli,azzino Montinari and others, (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1967- ), III<sub>1</sub> (1972), pp. 239-330 (pp. 254-61).

He argued that despite (or because of) its ability to move men to action, it was flawed by a tendency to distort the past:

Bis dahin wird die monumentale Historie jene volle Wahrhaftigkeit nicht brauchen können: immer wird sie das Ungleiche annähern, verallgemeinern und endlich gleichsetzen, immer wird sie die Verschiedenheit der Motive und Anlässe abschwächen, um auf Kosten der *causae* die *effectus* monumental, nämlich vorbildlich und nachahmungswürdig, hinzustellen [...] (p. 257).

Furthermore, Nietzsche argued that should monumental history writing predominate then ‘so leidet die Vergangenheit selbst *Schaden*: ganze grosse Theile derselben werden vergessen, verachtet, und fliessen fort wie eine ununterbrochene Fluth, und nur einzelne geschmückte Facta heben sich als Inseln heraus’ (p. 258). In other words, Nietzsche discerns beneath monumental histories a torrent of repressed experience and knowledge, dangerously glossed over by facile simplifications. Indeed, one can go one step further than Nietzsche here and argue that projects of monumental history in themselves are texts in a constant and dangerous state of tension, threatened by implosion into their carefully repressed Others and thus threatened by self-deconstruction. It should not be hard to see that this inherent tendency was further intensified in the Jünger of 1920 in whose text the conflict between the claims of monumental history on the one hand, and the mostly repressed sense of absurdity we saw in the *Kriegstagebuch*, is played out. The result is a highly unstable text which, despite Jünger’s efforts to the contrary, is inhabited by elements which do not fit at all into the project of monumental history and through which the project tends to deconstruct and unravel itself.

Even in the Foreword, where Jünger sets out his agenda for a monumental history, the project is significantly threatened. For a start, its politics were far from straightforward. Despite his reference to Germany’s greatness, Jünger was not tied exclusively to a traditional nationalist agenda as three elements show. First, his rejection of civilian jingoism’s false pathos, its ‘triviales Zeitungsgewäsch, die ausgelaugten Worte von Helden und Heldentod’ (p. VII), shared by many former front-line soldiers, undermines the remnants of Wilhelminian ideology. Second, his declaration that *the* soldier had been more

important than the nation transcends the state: ‘*Gleichviel* [my emphasis – JK] wofür er kämpfte, sein Kampf war übermenschlich. Die Söhne waren *über ihr Volk* [my emphasis – JK] hinausgewachsen’ (p. VII). And third, he goes beyond any politicisation by appealing to a vaguely religious sense of meta-history to redeem the Fallen: ‘das ist mir Evangelium: Ihr seid nicht umsonst gefallen. Wenn auch das Ziel ein anderes, größeres ist, als ihr erträumtet’ (p. VIII). The effect of these three elements is to produce a fragmented monument whose patriotic agenda is undermined (pp. VII, VIII) before it is even articulated (p. IX).

Jünger’s attempts to remember the dead were also problematic. In his portrayal, the lionised *Sturmtrupps*, these stylised ‘geschneidige Tiger der Gräben’ and ‘geduldige, eisenbeladene Tagelöhner des Todes’ (p. VI) become emblematic of Jünger himself. Jünger thus entered into an ambivalent and complex relationship with his former comrades, for whilst he was speaking for the front line troops, both living and dead, they were also speaking for him, representing what was already a reworked version of himself at war, a new kind of hero in a new kind of war. His appropriation of the dead was in conflict with a memorial and monumental project.

Moreover, his recognition of the nature of this new kind of war gave the lie to this heroic, epic and thus monumental image — again before it was even articulated. Jünger focused on the decentring effect of industrialised combat in which technical dominance counted far more than the individual:

Eins hebt sich indes immer klarer aus der Flut der Erscheinungen: Die überragende Bedeutung der Materie. Der Krieg gipfelte in der Materialschlacht; Maschinen, Eisen und Sprengstoff waren seine Faktoren. Selbst der Mensch wurde als Material gewertet (*In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub>, p. V).

Jünger’s clear awareness of this *Wende* — no trumpets and flags, neither ‘frohliche Reitertage’ nor ‘ritterliches Fechten und Sterben’ but a ‘Wüste des Irrsinns’ (p. V) — stands in crass contrast to his heroic and monumental agendas.

Despite the massive problems facing Jünger and his inability to resolve them even in the Foreword, his conservative imagination nevertheless refused to be deterred from his

monumental project. In editing the *Kriegstagebuch* he consistently attempted to realise this project and produce a text that was unified, patriotic, heroic and exemplary — and failed as this project consistently deconstructed itself.

#### **6.4 Editing the *Kriegstagebuch*: Reconstructing and Reinterpreting the War**

In the Foreword, Jünger states that *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> arose ‘aus dem in Form gebrachten Inhalt meiner Kriegstagebücher’ (p. VII) and uses this assertion to guarantee the accuracy of his book: ‘Ich habe mich bemüht, meine Impressionen möglichst unmittelbar zu Papier zu bringen, weil ich merkte, wie rasch sich die Eindrücke verwischen und wie sie schon nach wenigen Tagen eine andere Färbung annehmen [...] es hat sich gelohnt. Ich habe mir die Frische der Erlebnisse gewahrt’ (p. VII). The redactional work, upon which Jünger does not, however, elaborate, had three major external aspects which I shall examine in turn. First, there was a substantial amount of narrative reorganisation which transformed the text from a diary into a coherent book with literary pretensions. Second, significant passages were cut. Third, Jünger provided extensive passages of commentary and introduced new metaphors and similes to interpret the raw material. At the same time, I shall pay particular attention to his attempts to formulate a monumental history together with the attendant breaks and inconsistencies and thus locate those places where the project begins to deconstruct itself.

##### **6.4.1 Narrative Reorganisation**

In the process of turning the *Kriegstagebuch* into a monumental history Jünger had first to reorganise his material into a publishable literary form and thus into a coherent, retrospective whole. Although there are passages in the diary where Jünger virtually footnotes himself, referring back to previous incidents and noting anniversaries and recurrences, the diary itself was an unstable text in the process of production, incapable of marking its own end or overcoming its own provisionality. Accordingly, much of Jünger’s redactional work aimed at transforming the diary notes into a unified narrative sequence,

such that Gerhard Loose suggested that *In Stahlgewittern* is a late example of and variation on the German *Bildungsroman*.<sup>11</sup>

The book attempts to provide a closed and coherent, and thus monumental and unproblematic, account of Ernst Jünger's War. It begins with the mobilisation and the schoolboy's frantic attempts to enlist<sup>12</sup> and finishes, somewhat abruptly, with the award of the *Pour le Mérite*. Within this framework Jünger is able to reorganise the time scale of the book, making connections forwards as well as backwards and recasting daily diary entries into chapter-sized units.<sup>13</sup> Almost every chapter of *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> follows the same basic narrative pattern: the scene is set, followed by action reconstructed from the manuscript, and at the end Jünger inserts a set of conclusions in which the lessons learnt are summarised or the events narrated are reflected upon.

A brief comparison of two accounts of the same incident illustrates the nature of much of Jünger's redactional work at the stylistic level. His first experience of the War was in January 1915 when the village of Orainville, situated behind the front, was bombarded. In the *Kriegstagebuch* he describes it thus:

Am nächsten Morgen wurden wir eingeteilt. Ich kam zur 9. Kompanie. Wir legten uns dann etwas in die Schule des Ortes. Plötzlich krachte es ziemlich in unsrer Nähe. Aus allen Häusern liefen die Soldaten auf die Strasse. Dann pfiiff es 3 Mal dicht über uns hinweg. Alles lachte und niemand lief, aber jeder senkte den Kopf. Wenige Augenblicke später wurden die ersten Getroffenen auf Zeltbahnen herangezogen (*Ktb* 1, 2 January 1915).

In *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> the language has been significantly changed:

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<sup>11</sup> Loose, p. 32. Some comments of Jünger's would appear to support this interpretation. At the end of the first chapter, for instance, he notes that the initial hardships had been a 'gute Schule'. It is, however, hard to see what process of *Bildung* he went through — other than that of acquiring professional skills as an infantry officer and military honours.

<sup>12</sup> Eliminated from *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>2</sub> onwards. *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>2</sub> refers to *In Stahlgewittern. Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stoßtruppführers von Ernst Jünger, Kriegsfreiwilliger, dann Leutnant und Kompanieführer im Füs.-Regt. Prinz Albrecht von Preußen (Hann. Nr. 73), Leutnant im Reichswehr-Regiment Nr. 16. Mit dem Bilde des Verfassers* (Berlin: E.S. Mitter & Sohn, 1922).

<sup>13</sup> For example, describing the first time he moved forward to the front line, he adds, anticipating the rest of the text and looking forward in a way that was impossible for the diary writer: 'Wie oft bin ich nach diesem ersten Mal in halb melancholischer, halb erregter Stimmung durch ausgestorbene Landschaften zur vorderen Linie geschritten' (p. 3).

Unser erster Kriegstag sollte nicht vorübergehen, ohne uns einen entscheidenden Eindruck zu hinterlassen: Wir saßen in der uns als Quartier angewiesenen Schule und frühstückten. Plötzlich dröhnte eine Reihe dumpfer Erschütterungen in der Nähe, während aus allen Häusern Soldaten dem Dorfeingang zustürzten. Wir befolgten dies Beispiel, ohne recht zu wissen warum. — Wieder ertönte ein eigenartiges, nie gehörtes Flattern und Rauschen über uns und ertrank in polterndem Krachen. Ich wunderte mich, daß die Leute um mich sich zusammenduckten wie unter furchtbarer Drohung.

Gleich darauf erschienen schwarze Gruppen auf der menschenleeren Dorfstraße, in Zeltbahnen oder auf den verschränkten Händen schwarze Bündel schleppend [...] (p. 2).

The language has become more formal, less familiar and less personal. The diary account has been rewritten in a grammatically more sophisticated language in which prepositions and conjunctions link incidents and impressions into a whole. The vocabulary is significantly broader. In other words, the passage as a whole is more suitable for publication.

Furthermore, Jünger has developed a very different perspective on the events described. He attempts to provide a retrospective overview of the events and so overcome the limited perspective of the hurried sentences of the *Kriegstagebuch*. This incident is particularly significant in Jünger's experience of the War and in *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> it is turned quite specifically into a type of initiation by the emphasis on 'unser erster Kriegstag', the 'nie gehörtes Flattern' and on his own naiveté 'ich wunderte mich'. Moreover, in *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> Jünger makes his first experiences of the War typical of his generation: 'Wir hatten Hörsäle, Schulbänke und Werkische verlassen und waren in den kurzen Ausbildungswochen zusammengeschmolzen zu einem großen, begeisterten Körper, Träger des deutschen Idealismus der nachsiebziger Jahre' (p. 1). As such he was able to invest the event with greater (monumental) significance than the diarist of 1915, drawing attention to key events within a disciplined and structured whole.

One final significant aspect of Jünger's restructuring was the reduction of the diary to a manageable size. This is most evident in the case of the battle of Les Épargnes (*Ktb 2* with its 86 hand-written sides is condensed to 4½ sides of print) and the extended period of positional warfare around Monchy and Douchy. Here, Jünger polishes up the semi-literary

essay account of a typical day in the trenches to be found in the *Kriegstagebuch* and provides ‘einen Auszug von den Notizen, die ich damals in den Nächten von Monchy niederschrieb’ (p. 26). These are, incidentally, also rewritten in more sober language.

These cuts, stylistic improvements and structural links were undertaken for reasons of readability and coherence. The primary motivation was literary — for a badly written and incoherent text cannot provide the basis of a convincing monumental history — and they remain relatively unproblematic. However, the cuts and additions to which we shall now turn were laden with the tension between monumental history on the one hand and real experience and a partially repressed deconstructive sense of absurdity on the other.

#### **6.4.2 Exclusions and Moderations**

The most striking aspect of the *Kriegstagebuch* for the seasoned reader of *In Stahlgewittern* is the amount of hitherto unfamiliar, highly complex and often contradictory material that it contains. Having analysed this material in detail in the last chapter, I shall provide no more than a brief summary of the major cuts here:

1. non-soldierly biography
2. sexual adventures
3. drunken hooliganism
4. dreams of escape; radical questioning
5. disciplinary incidents
6. extreme egotistical self-indulgence
7. Nature and entomology
8. brutal visual descriptions

In short, *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>* is characterised by a consistent attempt to tone down the diary and produce a coherent text compatible with the project of monumental history — heroic, exemplary and acceptable to Jünger’s imagined audience, his comrades, living and dead. By removing references to his own life beyond the front, Jünger could make his life more typical of the front itself. By removing brothels, prostitutes and drunken disorder, Jünger

sanitised the front and, despite his protests about the civilians at home, made his text conform to the way the front *should* have been and thus acceptable to a conservative imagination. By removing those passages of doubt, grief and despair, he eliminated his own crisis of belief in the sense of the War. By removing his own clashes with authority, he cleaned up his own image. By excising passages of self-apotheosis, he made his text bearable. By removing the search for stability through the irruptive power of Nature, he attempts to make the War a sufficient source of sense in itself. And for all the vaunted ‘Sachlichkeit’ of *In Stahlgewittern*, the most brutal elements noted in the *Kriegstagebuch* have been tamed so that we neither hear the maggots that infest a corpse on the Somme,<sup>14</sup> nor smell the ‘Darminhalt’ of the punctured entrails of the signallers in the cellar at Fresnoy.<sup>15</sup> These elements form a repository of repressed experience, which, although excised from the public text still makes its presence felt throughout *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub>, deconstructing the monumental surface.

### 6.4.3 Additions and Elaborations

Jünger’s redactional work was thorough and extensive, but cuts alone were not sufficient to accomplish his intended project and he correspondingly added substantial sections of text. Although less dramatic than the cuts, the additions that he made when writing *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> give us considerable insight into Jünger’s evolving understanding of the War. I shall now look at the most significant additions and alterations in turn and the problems they paradoxically bring to the monumental project.

#### 6.4.3.1 *The Memory of the Front Line Officer?*

Because *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> attempts to overcome the extremely subjective perspective of the diary Jünger adds comments that tend to depict his experiences as typical of his generation of front-line officers. For example, he writes of his initial experiences in terms

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<sup>14</sup> This is literally the case: ‘Wir bedeckten etliche Tote mit Erde, bei einem konnte man nicht vorbeigehn, ohne das Gewühl der Würmer zu hören. Sein Schenkel war aufgebrochen, darin wühlte eine weißlichschleimige Masse’ (*Ktb* 6, 24 August 1916).

<sup>15</sup> *Ktb* 10, 28 April 1917.

of a 'wir' that comprises *Kriegsfreiwillige* (as opposed to enlisted soldiers) (p. 5). By means of a rhetorical question he attempts to make his romanticisation of the positional warfare at Monchy/Douchy a general and commonplace experience: 'Welcher Grabenkämpfer kennt diese Stimmung nicht?' (p. 25). And his struggle with a 'mulmiges' feeling in the course of 'Die große Schlacht' is transformed from a personal into a general one with which 'der Führer' has to contend (p. 157). These additions are symptomatic of Jünger's desire to produce a monumental text that will speak for the living and the dead of his generation of front-line officers. At the same time, however, they remain precariously perched on a personal narrative and thus reveal the fragility of Jünger's attempt to give his diary monumental dimensions.

#### **6.4.3.2 Professional Competence**

Although Jünger toned down the excesses of self-indulgent praise which occasionally find their way into the *Kriegstagebuch*, he remained very concerned to portray himself as a competent soldier and officer. His motivation here was most likely double-edged. On the one hand he was voicing the resentment of a whole generation of junior officers at the way the High Command had conducted the War. He condemns the trivial nature of the rules by which the civilian population was governed (p. 27). He criticises the rigid line of defence (p. 60). He suggests that his time as an observation officer in Fresnoy was wasted because of faulty staff work: 'Überzentralisation' (p. 77). He blames the volunteers' disillusion on leadership failures (p. 6). On the other hand, he most likely also had an eye to his own position in the *Reichswehr* and thus plays up his tactical competence. He avoids mentioning that his wounding at Les Épargés was the result of his own feckless impatience when moving forward. He describes his 'blitzschnelle, logische Schärfe' (p. 36) on his first patrol. He expands his account of his role organising the return from the front at Guillemont (p. 57). In 'Gegen Inder', he places particular emphasis on a 'von mir erfundene Art des Vorgehens' (p. 83). His soldiers are made to praise his tactical sense (p. 92). In his account of the battle of Cambrai, he draws attention to the effect that his tactical

objections had had on the outcome of the regiment's counter-attack (p. 127), and he does the same in 'Die große Schlacht' (p. 155).

The result of these apparently quite superficial professional comments is to highlight an important problem with his monumental history. His critique of the hitherto established generals can be linked to his diagnosis of the industrialised battlefield in 'Technik' (Cf. Chapter 7.3, p. 188 below). Their tactics were for a long time inappropriate, adhering instead to outdated forms embedded in a classically modern mentality which insisted on the primacy of Man. Jünger's tactical critique thus implicitly includes a deep-seated critique of the anthropocentric mentality of classical modernity. Within this conflict between old notions of Humanity and Jünger's clear realisation of the dominant role of technology in the War there resides a powerful new deconstructive element which makes the task of writing monumental history essentially impossible.

#### **6.4.3.3 Ideological Stabilisation**

Whilst Jünger's critique of the generals points to a deep-seated crisis, on the surface his text is characterised by ideological consolidation in conformity with received values. His vocal criticism in the *Kriegstagebuch* of the old Prussian Army to whose disciplinary procedures he was subject, is removed and replaced by comments that suggest a wholesome allegiance to the system. Thus, the combat readiness of his troops in the run-up to the Somme is a sign of the 'unbeugsame Entschlossenheit hannoverscher Füsiliere' (p. 40). The burial service at the end of this chapter is no longer an occasion for desperate questing, but rather reveals the 'hoher ethischer Wert' of death in combat (p. 45). 'Altpreußische Strammheit' (!) overcomes sexual liaisons with local women (p. 66). Jünger even indulges in crude *völkisch* platitudes absent from the diary when he praises the stolid virtues of the Lower Saxons (p. 72).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Another example of this is his positive comment that the Flemish population of Belgium were 'von germanischem Typ' (p. 92) whose order and efficiency distinguished them from the allegedly superficial French with their supposed lack of hygiene.

In *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>* Jünger also depicts a number of incidents from 1918 much more positively than he had done in the *Kriegstagebuch*. Instead of his scathing criticism of the falsified reports written for and by the General Staff about his unit's action in Summer 1918, he actually quotes a Divisional Order which specifically praises him (p. 172). His company in 'Mein letzter Sturm' is much more willing to move forward than the sullen and resentful troops of the *Kriegstagebuch*. And the regimental commander's order to advance to the attack becomes an 'ernste Mitteilung' (p. 176) rather than a 'traurige' (*Ktb* 14b, 25 August 1918). By such alterations, Jünger was moving towards an ideologically loaded monumental history and in so doing he transformed the actual atmosphere at the front to a considerable extent.<sup>17</sup> Such conscious manipulation of the text could not, however, fully repress his actual resentment of the real situation, which, partially at least, re-emerges in his apparently neutral, professional critique of his generals.

#### **6.4.3.4 Heroic Tropes**

Despite Jünger's implicit criticism of the military leadership for an outdated perspective on the War, *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>* remains indebted to traditional heroic discourse. But *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>* offers no resolution to the dichotomy between the heroic imagination, crucial to a monumental history, and the diagnosis of the dominance of technology but rather widens it. Whilst emphasising his own capabilities as an officer, he is also at pains to emphasise the role played by heroic and courageous activity in contrast to mere technical competence. In so doing he stylised the clash of *Stoßtruppführer* into a quasi-epic duel in a passage added to the diary text:

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<sup>17</sup> This falsification of the events of Summer 1918 would reach its peak in *Das Wäldchen 125<sub>1</sub>*. Cf. Chap. 11.5.

Man hört so oft die irrige Ansicht, daß der Infanteriekampf zu einer uninteressanten Massenschlächtereier herabgesunken ist. Im Gegenteil, heute mehr denn je entscheidet der Einzelne. Das weiß jeder, der sie in ihrem Reich gesehen hat, die Fürsten des Grabens mit den harten entschlossenen Gesichtern, tollkühn, so sehnig, geschmeidig vor- und zurückspringend, mit scharfen, blutdürstigen Augen, Helden, die kein Bericht nennt. [...] Unter allen nervenerregenden Momenten des Krieges ist keiner so stark, wie die Begegnung zweier Stoßtruppführer zwischen den engen Lehmwänden des Grabens. Da gibt es kein Zurück und kein Erbarmen. Blut klingt aus dem schrillen Erkennungsschrei, der sich wie Alldruck von der Brust ringt (p. 133).

Here, Jünger is describing the sordid business of a trench clearing action in language more suitable to the field of Illium since, with its 'Fürsten' and 'Führer' as individual heroes, the passage seeks to immortalise these soldiers as though they were Achean and Trojan captains. Nevertheless, the passage deconstructs itself. The men involved are unnamed as Jünger, lacking Homer's narrative perspective which allowed him to name and praise the valour of the heroes of both sides, names only himself and a few fellow officers from the 73rd Fusiliers.<sup>18</sup> The individual, as Jünger admits, sinks into narrative irrelevance, further unravelling the foundations of his monumental project — for what is the use of anonymous heroism that goes untold? Furthermore, the passage protests too stridently against the 'irrsinnige' view that the War was merely technocratic killing and thus poetically uninteresting and hence incompatible with monumentality. If Jünger is protesting, then he is protesting against his own sense, which comes through much more directly in the diaries, that the War was indeed madness, or rather, as he writes here, a 'Massenschlächtereier' — but, unredeemed by heroism.

But at the same time as propagating a belief in heroic virtues and the value and role of the individual, heroic soldier/officer, Jünger cannot conceal the mechanised and decentring aspects of the War. The diagnosis of the *Materialschlacht* in the Foreword is complemented in the text of the book itself by two passages whose metaphorical language involves a concentrated, technicist interpretation of the War wholly absent from the diary.

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<sup>18</sup> After relating the news of the death of Lt. Brecht, Jünger writes of him: 'Er war einer der wenigen, die infolge ihres unermüdlichen Draufgängertums sogar in *diesem prosaischesten aller Kriege* [my emphasis – JK] von einem romantischen Nimbus umgeben waren' (p. 120).

Indeed, his attempt to transform the *Stoßtrups* into latter-day epic heroes is preceded by a passage which describes their tactics *as* technology:

Die Stoßtrupp-*Technik* [my emphasis – JK] trat in Funktion. Wurfgeschosse wanderten von Mann zu Mann durch die Kette der Hände; Scharfschützen nisteten sich hinter Schulterwehren ein, um die feindlichen Werfer aufs Korn zu nehmen, die Zugführer spähten über Deckung, um einen Gegenstoß rechtzeitig zu erkennen und die Bedienungen der leichten MG.'s bauten ihre Waffen an schußfeldbietenden Stellen auf (p. 129).

And in a passage referring to his service as an observation officer, Jünger writes:

Das moderne Schlachtfeld gleicht einer ungeheuren, ruhenden *Maschinerie*, in der ungezählte verborgene Augen, Ohren und Arme untätig auf die eine Minute lauern, auf die es allein ankommt. Dann fährt als feurige Ouvertüre eine einzelne rote Leuchtkugel aus irgend einem Erdloche in die Höhe, tausend Geschütze brüllen zugleich auf, und mit einem Schläge beginnt das *Werk* der Vernichtung, von unzähligen *Hebeln* getrieben, seinen *zermalmenden* Gang.

Befehle fliegen wie *Funken* und *Blitze* durch ein *engmaschiges Netz*, um vorne zu gesteigerter Vernichtung anzuspornen und von hinten in gleichmäßigem Strome neue Menschen und neues Material in Bewegung zu setzten und in die Brandung zu schleudern. Jeder fühlt sich wie durch einen Strudel von weither *durch einen rätselhaften Willen gepackt und mit unerbittlicher Präzision* zu den Brennpunkten tödlichen Geschehens getrieben [my emphasis – JK] (p. 65).

In other words, at these junctures, the very language of *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> makes explicit the radically technical and decentering nature of the warfare Jünger had been involved in. Through these passages, then, the text is thus violently opened to that industrialised anti-modernity that is the Other of his monumental history which thus deconstructs itself through its inability to suppress successfully the brutal reality of modern combat experience.

#### 6.4.3.5 *Lingering Absurdity*

Jünger's recognition of the technical, chaotic and oppressive conditions of the modern battlefield emerges, moreover, into a metaphor of emptiness in which the repressed, despairing passages of the *Kriegstagebuch* re-emerge. Thus, in his conclusion to 'Les Épargés' Jünger writes:

Ich hatte an einer großen Kampfhandlung teilgenommen, ohne einen Gegner zu Gesicht bekommen zu haben. Erst viel später erlebte ich den Zusammenprall des modernen Kampfes im Erscheinen der Infanteristen auf freiem Felde, das für entscheidende, mörderische Augenblicke die chaotische Leere des Schlachtfeldes unterbricht (p. 16).

For Jünger, in 1920, the battlefield of Les Éparges (actually hilly and wooded) was a ‘chaotische Leere’, an absurd space, where meaning is absent. For Jünger the simple, lethal clarity of physical human conflict between bodies of soldiers, in conformity with received images, provided a sense of human reality wholly absent from the lethal fields of fire that swept over the devastated crater fields of the Somme and Flanders, where even the trees were rapidly shot away. The implicit message of his celebration of the exceptional moment (by the standards of the Western Front) is to admit that the remainder involved a crushing sense of the absence of meaning.

The metaphor of emptiness occurs twice more in the latter part of the book:

Ein unbeschreiblich unangenehmes, leeres Gefühl beschleicht die Nerven beim Durchschreiten einer unbekanntem Stellung zur Nachtzeit, auch wenn das Feuer nicht sonderlich stark ist. Auge und Ohr des Kriegers werden durch die sonderbarsten Täuschungen gereizt; er fühlt sich zwischen den drohenden Wänden des Grabes einsam wie ein Kind, das sich in dunkler Heide verirrt hat (p. 127).

Here the metaphor of emptiness, and thus the sense of human desolation, is made bleaker by the comparison with the terror of the lost child. Similarly, describing the tin hut in which he was housed on his return to the regiment in 1918, Jünger writes: ‘Trat man vor die Tür der Hütten, so empfand man jenes beängstigende Gefühl der Leere, von dem der Cowboy, der Beduine und jeder andere Einödbewohner zuweilen gepackt wird’ (p. 162). Again, although these metaphors are not to be found in the diary they retain in an occluded form the acute sense of absurdity which prevails there, deconstructing the monumental project by marking the traces of a profound sense of absence of meaning.

But a recognition of absurdity is not limited to this metaphor since *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>* actually uses language which vividly communicates the alien nature of the experience of modern war. Thus, the first bombardment is a ‘gespentsche Erscheinung’ (p. 3), and the wounded are seen with a ‘merkwürdig beklommenen Gefühl der Unwirklichkeit’ (p. 2). Jünger’s description of the march into action at Guillemont is embellished with the famous Dante quote, ‘Lasciate ogni speranza’ (p. 49) transposing the deadly night battlefield to the realms of the Inferno and the unreal. Indeed, at times Jünger

confesses the inability of language to capture the scenes experienced, such that in one passage he experiences ‘ein *unbeschreibliches* Gefühl der Einsamkeit und Verlassenheit [my emphasis – JK]’ (p. 93). Such passages function as black holes in the text, holes punched into the fabric draped over the contradictory and horrific memory of the War which not even language, let alone a monumental history, was able to be master.

But Jünger does not stop there. Apparently oblivious to his monumental project, he goes further still in *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>* and radically changes the whole emphasis of his original account. One striking example is his encounter with a group of German corpses during the battle of Les Éparges. In the *Kriegstagebuch* he describes part of the scene as follows:

Ein junger Kerl lag da auf dem Rücken und hatte die Hände, als ob er im Zielen vom Tode ereilt wäre. Ich konnte mich nicht enthalten, ihm in die Augen zu sehen, und schob deshalb seinen linken Arm mit dem Fuße bei Seite. Seine braunen gebrochenen Augen starrten nach oben. Übrigens lag sein geleertes Portemonnaie neben ihm. Nicht weit von dieser Stelle sah man aus einem Trümmerhaufen einen Rumpf hervorrage, dem Kopf und Hals bis tief auf die Schultern weggerissen waren. Die weißen Knochen ragten aus rötlich-schwarzem Fleische, aber der Anblick schien mir gar nicht so unangenehm (*Ktb* 2, 25 April 1915).

In *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>*, by contrast, we read:

Aus zerschossenem Gebälk ragte ein eingeklemmter Rumpf. Kopf und Hals waren abgeschlagen, weiße Knorpel glänzten aus rötlich-schwarzem Fleisch. Es wurde mir schwer, zu verstehen. Daneben ein ganz junger Mensch auf dem Rücken, die glasigen Augen und die Fäuste im Zielen erstarrt. Ein seltsames Gefühl, in solchen toten, fragenden Augen zu blicken. Ein Schaudern, das ich im Kriege nie ganz verloren habe. Neben ihm lag seine arme, ausgeplünderte Börse (pp. 13-14).

Two major redactional acts are striking here. First, the published version conceals Jünger’s morbid fascination and makes the encounter the result of chance. Second, Jünger’s fundamentally re-evaluates the incident. Gone is the off-hand, armoured bravado which pretends that the scene was ‘gar nicht so unangenehm’. The remnants of the corpse, dehumanised as its eyes change from brown to glassy, embodies the absurd. Indeed, Jünger uses the incident to depict his recurrent sense of absurdity when confronted personally with the dead, who disrupt the monumental project by unleashing a primal feeling of horror and sheer incomprehension breaking open the containing meta-narratives of classical modernity. Although it was the very aim of a monumental text to provide

meaning for the deaths of so many, it is precisely in the re-narration of the encounter with the dead that the project once again deconstructs itself.

Despite Jünger's efforts to eliminate the most blatant diary confessions of absurdity and their replacement, consciously or unconsciously, with metaphors and much terser indicators of absurdity, *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> actually adds two open confessions which expand substantially on the account given in the *Kriegstagebuch*. Consider his account of his wounding at Les Épargés. The *Kriegstagebuch* attempts to depict the incident with a forced bravado:

Ich sah wohl das Blut aus meinem Oberschenkel fließen, wollte aber nicht hinter meiner Buche fort. Endlich ließ ich mich überreden, schmiß meinen Tornister in den Dreck, nahm mein Gewehr als Stock und machte mich so schnell wie möglich auf den Graben zu. [...] (*Ktb* 2).

In the *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> version, however, he is much more prepared to confront his terror at being wounded for the first time:

Ich will offen gestehen, daß mich meine Nerven restlos im Stiche ließen. Nur fort, weiter, weiter! Rücksichtslos rannte ich alles über den Haufen. Ich bin kein Freund des Euphemismus: Nervenzusammenbruch. Ich hatte ganz einfach Angst, blasse, sinnlose Angst. Ich habe später noch oft kopfschüttelnd an jene Momente zurückgedacht (p. 15).

One further incident occurs in the various editions of *In Stahlgewittern* and involves Jünger's reaction to the decimation of his company when it took a direct hit en route to the start line of the *Michael* offensive in March 1918. In the *Kriegstagebuch* Jünger attempts to minimise his reaction:

Ich will nicht verheimlichen, daß auch ich zunächst vollkommen genug hatte. Ich sprang in den benachbarten Graben und fand dort einen kleinen Teil der Komp. vor. Dort ermannte ich mich wieder und schickte den Füs. Haller zum Verbinden, rief nach Sanitätern und ging selbst an die Stelle des Unglücks. [...] Einem hielt ich die Hand auf den Kopf, meiner Ohnmacht, zu helfen, fluchend (*Ktb* 13, 19 March 1918).

As with the previous passage, *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> expands considerably:

Ich will nicht verheimlichen, daß ich zunächst, wie alle anderen, nach einem Augenblick starren Entsetzens aufsprang und planlos in die Nacht rannte. Erst in einem kleinen Granatloch, in das ich kopfüber gestürzt war, wurde mir der Vorgang klar. Ich mußte mich an den schrecklichen Ort zurückzwingen [...] Einer meiner liebsten Rekruten, dem ein Splitter den Schenkel zerknickt hatte, klammerte sich an meinen Beinen fest. Meinem Unvermögen zu helfen, fluchend, klopfte ich ihm ratlos auf die Schulter. Solche Augenblicke vergißt man nie. [...] Ein blutjunges Milchgesicht, das vor einigen Tagen noch, von seinen Kameraden verspottet, beim Exerzieren der schweren Munitionskästen wegen geweint hatte, schleppte nun diese Last, die er aus der furchtbaren Szene gerettet hatte, getreulich auf unserem mühsamen Weg mit. Diese Beobachtung gab mir den Rest. Ich warf mich zu Boden und brach in ein krampfhaftes Schluchzen aus, während die Leute düster um mich herumstanden (p. 141).

These two passages go completely against the grain of Jünger's redactional work in producing *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub>. Normally one must read carefully to reveal the deep lingering sense of absurdity that haunts his concern to portray himself as a competent young officer, hardened by the War and immune to the assaults of horror and death. Here, however, he is trying retrospectively to confront and fix in writing the more shattering aspects of the experience that he had repressed when writing the diary. These expanded passages publicly reveal the gaps in the armour of the 'soldierly man', and are a further indication of Jünger's inability, despite his attempts to write a monumental history, to invest the War with sufficient meaning to resolve its oppressive and terrifying absurdity.

#### **6.4.3.6 Creating New Forms of Time**

The way Jünger deals with time in *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> also differs significantly from his diary. First, for formal literary reasons, he added references forwards and backwards in his text in order to produce an ordered whole. Second, he shortened extensive periods of positional warfare and paid far greater narrative attention to the rare periods of action. Thus, their significance in the text in terms of pages per month is greatly exaggerated compared to the manuscript diary (cf. Figure 1, p. 181). By drawing out those moments which were apparently heroic and inspirational Jünger's redactional work conforms with the project of monumental history. This project is, however, threatened by his rewriting of certain aspects of his experience of time. For example, whilst Jünger had noted in the diary that his first night on sentry duty had consisted of: '2 Stunden Vorposten und 2 Stunden

Grabenwache' (*Ktb* 1, 2 January 1915), in *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> Jünger turns the night into 'schier endlose Zeit' (p. 4), a significant shift of emphasis.

After the War, then, writing in a period of personal and political dislocation, Jünger is producing a textual version of time in which he explicitly remembers the War as a time of absurdity, a time that slips out of control and is full of 'marternde Gedanken' (p. 143). It is a time from which he tries to escape in his textual work by means of redactional excision and the book's consequent focus on major incidents, but which at the same time refuses to be fully repressed. Jünger's attempt at producing a temporal structure appropriate to monumental history was further undermined by his continued reliance in *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> on those precise timings which had, paradoxically, both anchored the sensory chaos of the *Materialschlacht* for the diarist but which had also permitted the technician co-ordination of infantry and artillery on a massive scale. It is thus caught between a reliance on mechanical time to provide any sense of structure and continuity in battle and a realisation that it is precisely this form of time that made this radical decentring possible in the first place. The resulting tension, combined with his inscription of absurdity into time, leads to the self-deconstruction of his attempt at constructing a suitably monumental form of time.

#### **6.4.3.7 *Weltgeschichte***

Whereas in the *Kriegstagebuch* Jünger had tried to eliminate history to produce a closed narrative time, in *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> he specifically appeals to World History as part of his monumental project. In so doing, Jünger was drawing on the massive German historicist tradition and appealing to History to redeem the War. Historians and philosophers had discerned a rational sense to the course of history and had declared that the meaning of human existence was to be found in the way history unfolded over time. Apparently confident in that established belief, which had legitimated the Prussian state and Prussian

policies,<sup>19</sup> Jünger declared that the Somme involved ‘unerhörte Heldenkämpfe, die wahrhaft einzig in der Weltgeschichte dastehen’ (p. 60). And he imputes ‘weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung’ (p. 104) to his own role in holding the Steenbach line at Paschendaele. The achievements of the German soldier in the War are such that it took ‘die ganze Welt’ to stop the offensive of 1918 and ‘die Geschichte wird anerkennen, daß wir gekämpft haben wie nie ein Volk zuvor’ (p. 137).

However, the violence and scale of the First World War was such that this comfortable historical faith was shaken at its roots, so radical was its absurdity. Consequently, here too, Jünger’s monumental project was extremely fragile. Whilst emphasising the world-historical importance of the battle of the Somme — seen as more of a fundamental turning point concerning tactics in the *Kriegstagebuch* — Jünger in *In Stahlgewittern<sub>1</sub>* also gives voice to the tragic realisation that the Somme (and Verdun and Flanders) represented the end of the Idealist historical tradition and the patriotic values it had both constituted and legitimated:

Erst dort sank die Blüte unserer disziplinierten Jugend in den Staub. Erhabene Werte, die das deutsche Volk groß gemacht hatten, leuchteten dort noch einmal in blendendem Glanze auf, um dann langsam in einem Meere von Schlamm und Blut zu erlöschen (p. 60).

Whilst Jünger’s historical perspective implies that world history is an uninterrupted progression, the War merely representing a monumental culmination of special significance and value, here he is forced to admit that the War was most emphatically not part of a continuity but rather a violent end. Despite Jünger’s declared affective attachment to this value system, this one sentence actually reveals a profound dislocation. The ending represented by the War cannot yet be sublated for Jünger by a system of historical thought. History’s integrative functionality has been rendered inoperative by the destruction of the system it had served. Jünger’s recognition of this ending consequently functions as yet

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Iggers, p. 17: ‘Wittingly, and to some extent, unwittingly, historicism provided a theoretical foundation for the established political and social structure of nineteenth-century Prussia and Germany’. Iggers also shows how German historians shared the belief that History was on Germany’s side (p. 128).

another subversive and deconstructive element within the monumental project that depends on an integrative, coherent and inspirational view of history.

#### **6.4.3.8 Attempted Assimilation of the War Experience through Intertextuality**

Complementing his appeal to World History, is Jünger's appeal to the literary canon to help integrate and redeem the War. As we saw in the last chapter Jünger had, towards the end of the *Kriegstagebuch*, used an increasingly wide set of literary references and this impetus, intensified by his post-War reading, was carried over into the production of *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub>. Thus, we move from Schiller (the militarised village in the first chapter possesses 'Wallensteinsche Romantik' (p. 2) to Ariosto (p. 101), Shakespeare (the rear-echelon commander dubbed the "König von Quéant" is implicitly Falstaffian in his vitality) to Karl May (p. 36), Dante, Goethe (p. 109) and the 'Dichterwort': 'Fürwahr ein Tag, von Gott gemacht, Zu besserm Ding als sich zu schlagen' (p. 78).

The most important, and most problematic, of Jünger's intertextual references, and one which would be developed extensively in *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, were the *Landsknechte* of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, a reference which remains wholly undeveloped in the *Kriegstagebuch*. In one passage, he refers directly to Dürer's engraving 'Ritter, Tod und Teufel':

Dieses Trankopfer nach glücklich bestandener Schlacht zählt zu den schönsten Erinnerungen alter Krieger.

Und wenn zehn vom Dutzend gefallen waren, die letzten zwei fanden sich mit tödlicher Sicherheit am ersten Ruheabend beim Becher, brachten den toten Kameraden ein stilles Glas und besprachen scherzend die gemeinsamen Erlebnisse. Den überstandenen Gefahren ein Landsknechtslachen, den künftigen einen Schluck aus voller Flasche, ob Tod und Teufel dazu grinsten, wenn nur der Wein gut war. So war von je rechter Kriegsbrauch (p. 79).

The radical nihilism of the *Landsknechte* stands in opposition to an integrative and interpretative monumental history for they incorporate not so much continuity and legitimisation as the disruption and anarchy of the Thirty Years War. In another passage, Jünger draws explicitly on Grimmelshausen to describe the troops he had described in the *Kriegstagebuch* simply as 'merkwürdige Kerls' (*Ktb* 14a, 22 July 1918):

Das einzige Vergnügen an der Sache bereitete mir das Vernehmen der Leute vom Sturmtrupp, die mich lebhaft an Grimmelshausens Simplizissimus erinnerten. Diese jungen Krieger mit gewaltigen Haarschöpfen und Wickelgamaschen gerieten 20 Meter vorm Feinde in einen heftigen Streit, weil einer den anderen Schlappsack geschimpft hatte und fluchten dabei wie die Landsknechte (p. 168).

In his post-War search for appropriate precedents from the literary canon Jünger has effectively replaced the loyal and triumphant captains of the *Iliad* with the freebooting mercenaries of *Simplicissimus*. Moreover, his very acts of comparison represent an imaginative leap out of a specific temporal and historical situation felt to be oppressive into one felt to be more vital and authentic. Through their anarchic implications Jünger's long-standing disaffection with the strictures of military (and parental) authority re-emerges and through their incongruous otherness they highlight the alien nature of the Western Front. Jünger's attempts at shoring up his monumental history through intertextuality have effectively deconstructed the heroic and integrating basis his project depended upon.

Jünger's use of the *Landsknechte* as a motif did not stop at simple comparisons, however. Rather, attached to the *Landsknecht* are the beginnings of Jünger's a-historical anthropology of the War which he would develop further in *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*<sub>1</sub>. Consider the following passage in which Jünger describes the mood of the troops before their departure for the Somme:

Wir wußten, daß es diesmal in eine Schlacht ging, wie sie die Weltgeschichte noch nie gesehen hatte. Bald schwoll die erregte Unterhaltung zu einem Gelärm, an dem alte Landsknechte oder friederizianische Grenadiere ihre Freude gehabt hätten (*In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub>, p. 48).

The status of history here is doubly problematic. First, the battle is unprecedented in scale and thus is already in a position which threatens to break the framework of monumental history. Second, Jünger postulates a deep-seated connection between his infantry, Prussian grenadiers and the freebooters of the 16th/17th Centuries. Although they are connected by Germanness, I want to argue that they are connected for Jünger more by a love of battle as such than by their nationality. The reason he can link his *Stoßtrupps* to the *Landsknechte* is that in his post-War interpretative work, Jünger discerns fundamental psychological

constants at work which implicitly negate historical difference. This comes out more clearly in a passage describing the mood of the German troops attacking the British lines in March 1918: ‘So mögen die Männer der Renaissance von ihren Leidenschaften gepackt sein, so mag ein Cellini gerast haben, Werwölfe, die heulend durch die Nacht hetzen, um Blut zu trinken’ (p. 146). The passage leaps from a Nietzschean celebration of the Renaissance to an incongruous, but equally Nietzschean, *Raubtieranthropologie* located in the involuntarily comic reference to werewolves,<sup>20</sup> which also relocates the action to the timeless sphere of Germanic myth (and hints at Hermann Löns’ *völkisch* novel, *Der Wehrwolf* (1910)).<sup>21</sup>

Via the motif of the *Landsknecht* we have arrived at Jünger’s elaboration, albeit crude and undeveloped, of an anthropology distilled from Nietzsche and Freud which posits that civilisation merely represses, partially and unsuccessfully, the violent instinctual life of humanity. This line of interpretation, wholly absent from the *Kriegstagebuch*, is not developed much in *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> — even if Jünger does use it to account for incidents when stretcher bearers were sniped at and recently captured prisoners were shot (we read on p. 123 of the ‘atavistischer Trieb, zu vernichten’ and on p. 151 of ‘gewaltige Urtriebe’). Emerging through these passages of text, however, is a sense that the project of monumental history was fundamentally flawed for in turning, even tentatively, to such an interpretative scheme Jünger is abandoning the modern premises of human rationality and morality and with them all hope of redemption through history. A monumental history simply cannot contain such radically ahistorical elements without deconstructing itself.

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<sup>20</sup> Compare Nietzsche’s comment in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887) that the predator is at the heart of all civilisations: ‘Auf dem Grund aller dieser vornehmen Rassen ist das Raubthier, die prachtvolle nach Beute und Sieg lüstern schweifende *blonde Bestie* nicht zu verkennen; es bedarf für diesen verborgenen Grund von Zeit zu Zeit der Entladung, das Thier muss wieder heraus, muss wieder in die Wildnis zurück [...]’, in *Werke*, VI<sub>2</sub> (1968), pp. 259-430, (p. 289).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Roger Woods, *Ernst Jünger and the Nature of Political Commitment*, pp. 59-98. Woods attributes much of Jünger’s initially one sided Nietzsche reception to the biography by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche.

## 6.5 Conclusions

I began this chapter by pointing out how much Jünger reception has tended to produce an oversimplified version of the author and his texts to suit critics' own agendas. In this chapter, drawing on the new material available in Marbach to examine its genesis, I have shown how *In Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub> is in fact a highly ambivalent and unstable text. Located in a fundamentally flawed project of monumental history, aimed at producing a literary text that would somehow bridge the gulf between the living and the dead and thus resolve Jünger's personal sense of post-War crisis, the extensive redactional work instead led to a text that constantly deconstructs itself. The memory of the War as absurd, located in the diary and re-experienced through the anarchic dislocation Jünger went through in early Weimar, was repressed in Jünger's redactional work which aimed at a politicised, heroic, coherent and inspirational monumental history that would legitimate him and his fallen comrades. However, it is precisely this unwelcome memory that constantly makes itself felt throughout the text, constantly unravelling Jünger's project, whether as a metaphor of emptiness, as a clear headed diagnosis of the role of technology, as a reference to Grimmelshausen instead of Homer, as a tactical critique of the General Staff or as a direct confrontation with his own grief and terror. Over and over again new disruptive and deconstructive elements irrupt into the text making for a fascinating text that refuses to be integrated into those neat patterns of interpretation that Jünger (and his critics) so desperately wanted. Before turning to Jünger's next substantial attempt to impose meaning on the War, namely *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*<sub>1</sub> (1922), I shall examine two little-known essays in the *Militärwochenblatt* and show how these too, albeit in a very different way, are characterised by a deconstructive tension between conflicting elements.

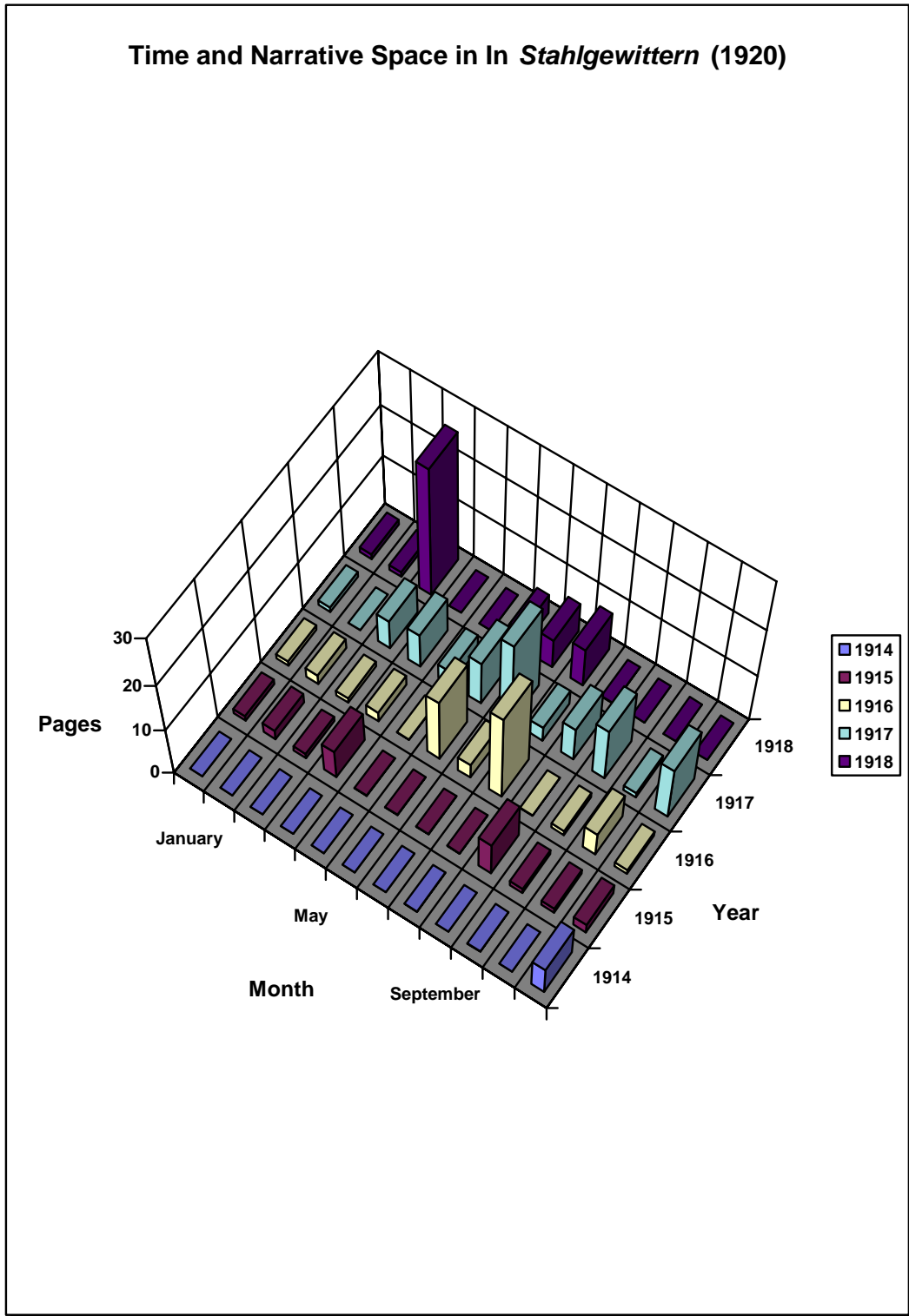


Figure 1: A Graphical Representation of Time and Narrative Space in In *Stahlgewittern*<sub>1</sub>.